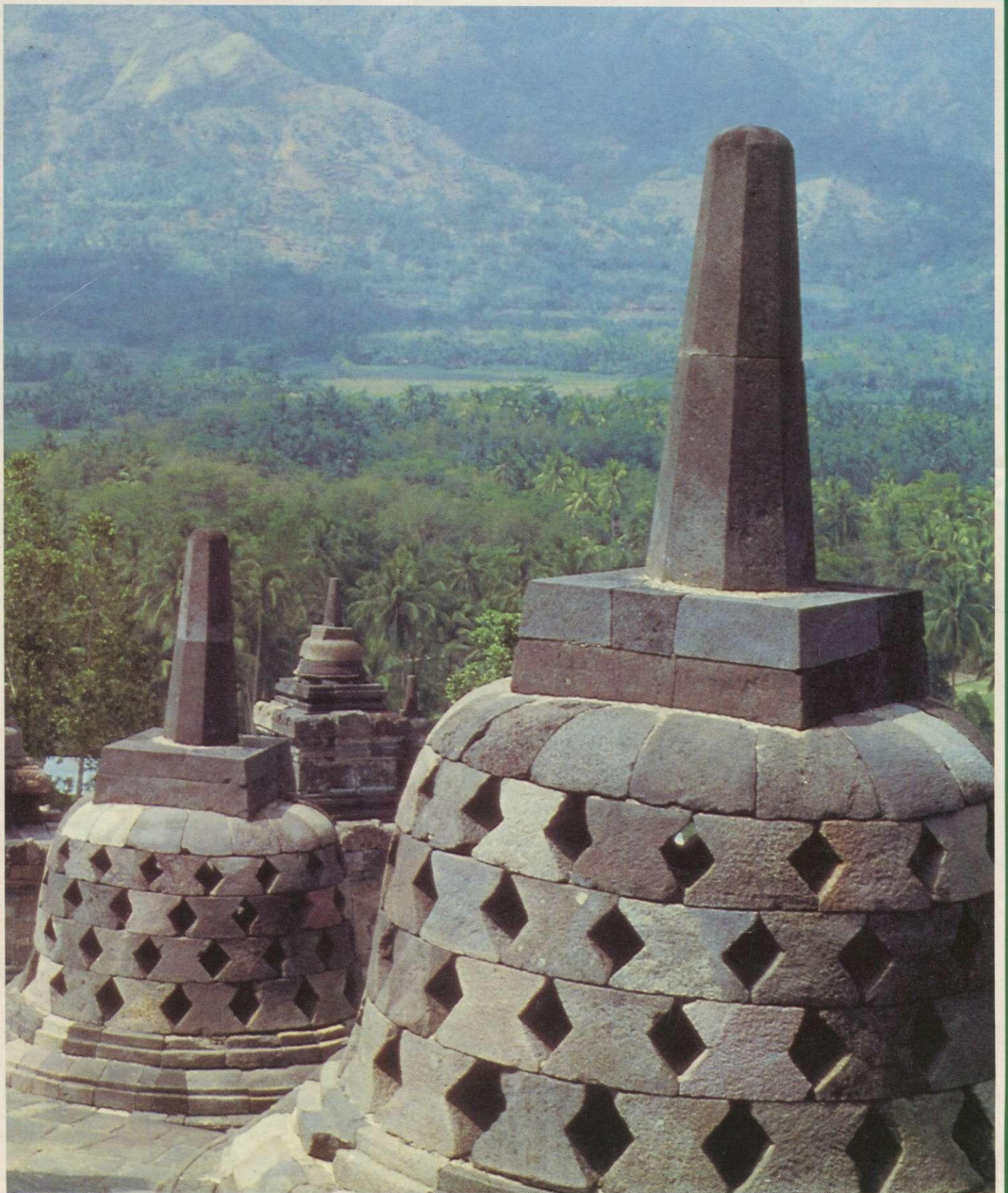


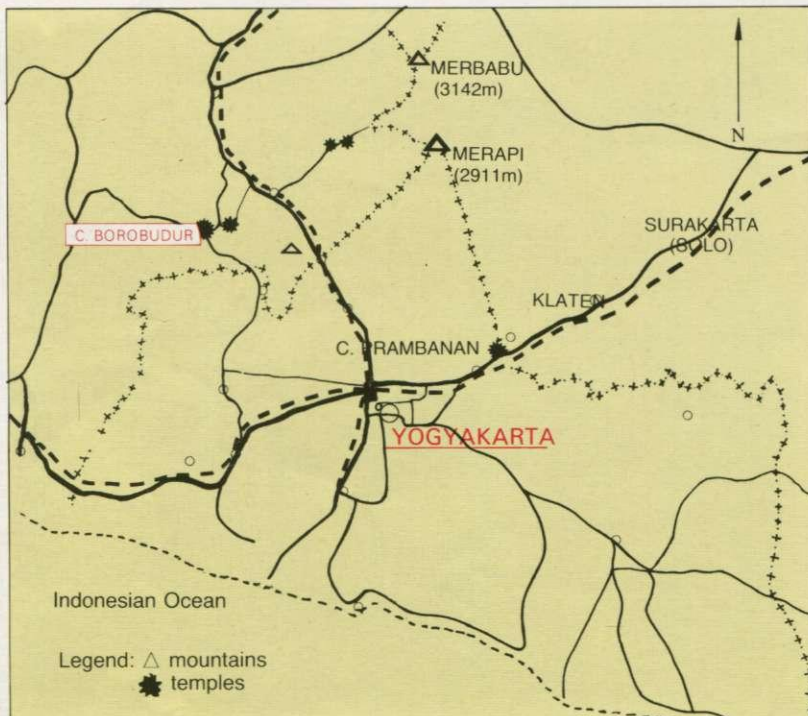
BOROBUDUR

INDONESIA'S LEGACY TO MANKIND



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A MIDST THE MOUNTAINS and plains of Indonesia's Central Java, lies the ancient Buddhist temple of Borobudur — one of the greatest Buddhist relics in existence. Even older than Cambodia's Angkor Wat, Borobudur is perhaps Indonesia's most well known monument and the largest stone construction in the southern hemisphere.



History

Not much is known of its early history. It is thought that the name 'Borobudur' comes from the Sanskrit — 'Vihara Buddha Udr', which means 'Buddhist monastery on the hill.' Located in the southern plains of Central Java, it is one of several Buddhist and Hindu temples built between the 8th and 10th century AD — at a time when two major dynasties ruled in Central Java — the Buddhist Sailendras and the Hindu Sanjayas.

Following a burst of creativity and activity which lasted for two centuries, (when the nearby Hindu Prambanan temple was also built fifty years later), the central plains were abandoned. The seat of power of the Hindu-Buddhist kings moved to east Java, where eventually they blended together with elements of Indonesian mysticism, to develop the tantric orders associated with the temples of that region.

For hundreds of years, Borobudur lay deserted. Neglected and forgotten, it rested, buried under piles of rubble and volcanic ash. Local people were superstitious and told haunting tales of the ghosts that inhabited the strange 'knights in cages' on the hill.

The temple owes its rediscovery to Sir Stamford Raffles. During the late Napoleonic era, Java was occupied by Britain and Raffles was Lieutenant Governor General. He was very interested in the history of Java and spent much time travelling the island, collecting cultural and historical information. In 1814 he was told of a mysterious site in central Java. Being too busy to go himself he sent an emissary — a

Dutchman named Cornelius — who was to discover one of the most important monuments in the world.

Cornelius went to make a survey. He took a party of 200 villagers to clear away the rubble and vegetation that concealed the overgrown edifice. As they began to clear the site, it became evident that they were revealing something of great significance. As parts of the carved terraces emerged, it was apparent that here lay a superb work of art. It was the work of highly skilled artisans who had worked lovingly on the rich detail in the carved grey stone. It must have taken many years for these artisans and labourers to assemble this sublime tribute to the Buddha, painstakingly constructed and carved with over 1.2 million pieces of stone.

Description

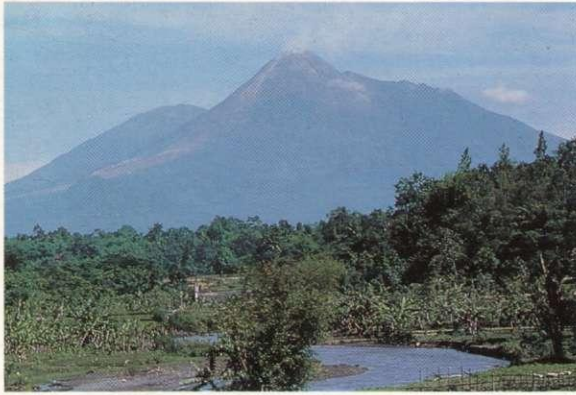
Borobudur is built as a Buddhist MANDALA, that is, a configuration to assist meditation, in the form of an enormous symmetrical pyramid, symbolising the ten steps of the Mahayana Buddhism vision of the cosmos. Enclosing a small hillock, it rests on a base of 123 metres square. Three open circular terraces top square galleries of carved andesite stone. Four sets of stairways lead up through finely carved gateways to the open terraces and the main stupa above. It is said that at one time, the grey stone was washed with gold or white which caused the whole edifice to glow in the sun like an earthly jewel.

At the lowest level, temporal life known as KAMADHATU with its earthy desires and passions is depicted realistically in bas relief. Although these panels have long been covered by a buttressing wall, part of it is revealed for the benefit of visitors. The next four levels make up the RUPADHATU, or the 'sphere of form'. These portray a world where man, although fighting his desires, is still bound to the material world. Episodes from the life of the Buddha are illustrated, with backgrounds of Javanese life in the 8th century, giving many insights into the lifestyles of the time.

The three top circular terraces depict ARUPADHATU — the sphere of formlessness or NIRVANA — the highest state of being that man can reach. On these terraces, all ornamentation ends and one is left to contemplate the universe. 72 'Dagobs', or miniature stupas stand, each containing a figure of the Buddha. To touch the hand or foot of one of these figures is said to bring good luck. The terraces culminate in a large stupa, representing Nirvana, which symbolically, is empty.

Unlike most temples, Borobudur contains no hall for worship, but utilises the natural surroundings. When one reaches the higher levels, the open sky and the vistas of mountains and the countryside form the 'roof' of the temple.

The outer walls of the galleries (balustrades) are designed with 432 niches, each containing a life sized statue of the Buddha, while on the higher terraces are 72 stupas containing figures. Together there are 504 statues of the Buddha. Along the terraces, the bas relief sculptures and stone carvings portraying the universe extend roughly three kilometers. As one makes one's way clockwise around the terraces, (it is always clockwise for Buddhist temples) the clarity and skilful execution of the stone carvings still enchant after a thousand years.



Mt. Merapi in Central Java

Built three centuries earlier than Angkor Wat and two centuries before Notre Dame, it is thought that Borobudur functioned as the candi (temple) where Buddhist ceremonies were attended by the higher priests. It was probably the centre of a sanctuary, surrounded by scattered smaller monuments; two of which remain. Candi Mendut and Pawon, about one kilometer away are much smaller, but thought to be part of a complex which probably included a monastery. Candi Mendut, the oldest of the three contains a three metre figure of the Buddha, carved from one piece of stone. Pawon is thought to be the temple to purify the mind before entering the main sanctuary of Borobudur. The three lie on a straight line which forms part of a pilgrim's path.

Festivals

The temple remains the site of annual pilgrimage. Once a year, in May, on the eve of the full moon, a ceremony known as Waicak is held, commemorating both the birthday and the enlightenment of the Buddha. Before the moon rises, Buddhist monks gather together at Candi Mendut for purification by holy water, then a procession slowly makes its way towards Pawon and finally to Borobudur. When the procession reaches the top level, after winding its way clockwise through the galleries, candles are lit and flowers strewn along the path, while devout monks chant and pray.

Restoration

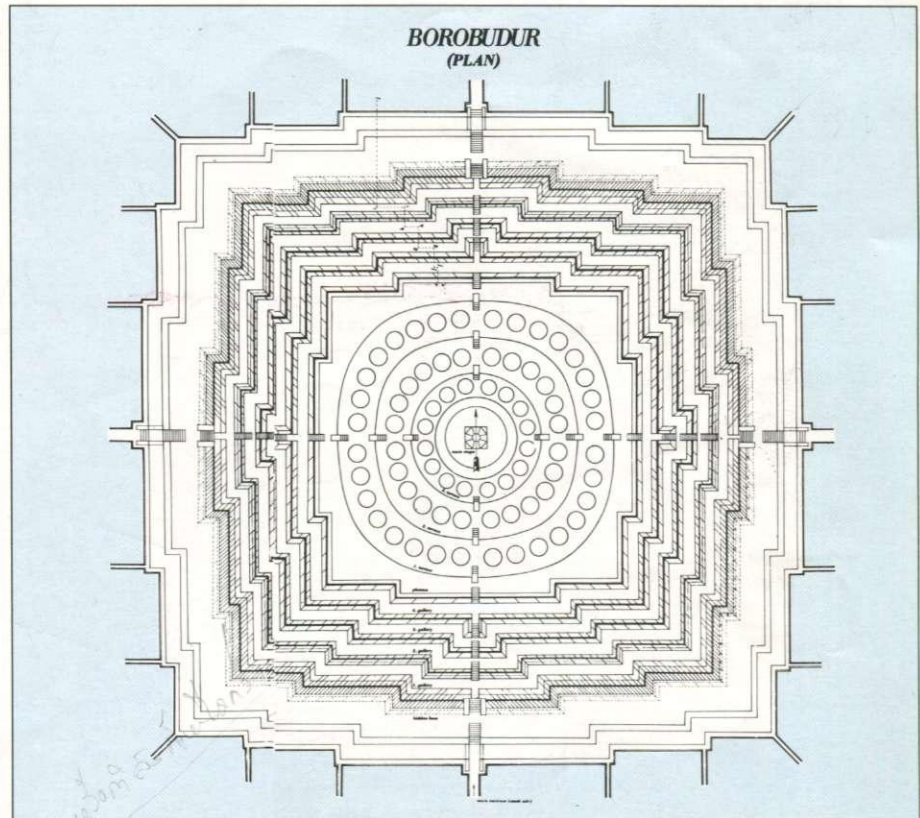
Early in the 20th century, the Dutch began a restoration project, and discovered that instead of solid stone, the monument comprised unmortared rocks encircling a small hillock. Over the years, the hill had become waterlogged and the whole structure began to fall apart at odd angles as the earth subsided. Borobudur was in danger of collapse.

Only recently, has the second massive renovation been completed. Borobudur's immeasurable cultural value was recognised and renovation work began in 1973. The Indonesian Government, UNESCO and world wide contributions jointly funded the project at the cost of US\$21 million. The massive restoration project took ten years. Completed in early 1983 and officiated by President Soeharto, this restoration ensures that Borobudur will last for another thousand years.

To truly feel the spirit of this monument, perhaps the most inspiring time to visit Borobudur is in the early morning, before the tourists make their appearance.



Bas - relief carvings of Borobudur.



Data: width 123 m
height— Original 42 m
— present 31,5 m
total of used stone material
— 55.000 m³

As the sun rises and the misty air is still and silent, one might just capture a little of the peace and serenity that existed in less hectic times.

Tours

To-day the visitor can see Borobudur in comfort. From Yogyakarta, there are numerous tours available, or one can hire a car and driver or take a taxi. It is a 1 — 1 1/2 hour drive from the city depending on your transport. Tours come with an experienced guide to explain the intricacies of the monument. From the archeological and recreation park at the base, it is an easy walk to the temple itself. Others make the excursion from Semarang, the seaport to the north. Cruise ships often call here, enabling passengers to visit. Borobudur is about 2 hours from Solo.



Children at a Javanese temple.

Around Yogyakarta

Yogyakarta (the cultural capital of Java) makes an excellent beginning to explore this fascinating region. Just out of Yogya is the old village of Kota Gede. Its winding alleyways and small shops are a delight to explore, where silversmiths work on intricate filigree jewellery and silverware, bumished in the time honoured way with charcoal.

The KRATON (palace) of Yogyakarta has just instated the new Sultan Hamengkubuwono the tenth, amidst much ceremony and celebration. This ancient palace is hidden behind thick white walls; a village of shops, quaint houses and many studios where painters and batik artists produce their crafts.

Seven km out of Yogya is the town of Kasongan, where unique ceramic figures are fired. Although the techniques are traditional, the whimsical animal designs are quite irresistible.

Many famous painters live in Yogya. Affandi, perhaps Indonesia's most prominent modern painter, lives here as do the modern batik masters Amri Yahya and Saptohudoyo. Bagong Kussudiarjo has built a cultural village where he interprets and teaches modern dances based on classical Indonesian themes and forms.

Yogya's most colourful street, Jalan Malioboro, links the old and new sections of the city and is definitely worth a visit. A shopping area in the day, bazaar in the evening and PASAR MALAM (night market) at night, its mood changes with the hour.

Jill Gocher.



The Ramayana dance drama.

Where To Stay

Best Yogya hotels are:

Garuda Hotel — a 4 star colonial style hotel situated on the central Jl Malioboro. Rates from US\$36 single.

Ambarrukmo Palace — 4 star built in the old Ambarrukmo Palace grounds. Rates from US\$60 single.

Mutiara Hotel — 3 stars on Jalan Malioboro. Rates from US\$28 single.

Puri Artha Cottages — charming cottages. Rates from US\$31 sgl.

Sri Wedari Hotel — 3 star hotel from US\$28 sgl.

Sahid Garden Hotel — 3 stars run by the national Sahid Group — ensures good service in garden setting. From US\$37 sgl.

Losmen (small guest houses) can be found in abundance behind the KRATON in Jl. Prawirotaman and near the railway station in Jl. Pasar Kembang. Rates range upwards from Rp 2000 a single to US\$17 a double depending on choice.



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